

IDEAS AT *Work*

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

'Student' Word Perfect works for business, too

Want to save a bundle on the most popular word processing program for personal computers? Word Perfect, which normally retails for \$495, is now available in a "student version" for just \$75. Like the original, it runs on IBM PCs and compatible computers, and has almost all the functions of the higher priced version.

In many business situations the student version is quite acceptable. And with a price just 15 percent of the regular price — an 85 percent savings — it provides a bargain too good to pass up.

First, a few words about the regular \$495 edition of Word Perfect. It is an exceptional program, and has become the top selling word processing program for IBM PCs in the last few years. It is not the easiest to learn and use, but neither are the other two top sellers, Multimate and Microsoft Word. Multimate seems to be popular in many large corporate environments, while Word Perfect is favored by small- and medium-sized businesses. Microsoft Word is favored by those who like a "mouse."

Like many consultants, I recommend Word Perfect regularly to my clients, mainly because it is a "full function" program, capable of handling almost any business situation, and has an excellent manual and tutorial section. The latest release, called 4.1, has many bells and whistles, and can perform virtually any function you can think of. It checks your spelling, allows letters to be merged with data base files, lets you perform DOS functions without exiting the program, and even lets you work with two documents on the screen.

So, how exactly is the newly released student version different from the regular version? Other than the absence of the following six features, the programs operate identically:

✓ "Switch" function, which permits you to jump back and forth between two documents, or

display two documents at the same time on the screen.

✓ "Merge" function, which is for creating mass mailings or common letters to many addressees.

✓ "Mark text" function, which is useful in creating indexes.

✓ "Math" function, for automatically calculating totals or entering formulas within documents.

✓ "Column" function, for displaying multiple columns of text on a single page.

✓ "Macro" function, for creating strings of commands that can be executed by simply typing the name of the macro.

What is the same? Everything else. The spell checker, the ability to print documents on virtually any printer, all the help functions are available.

The key question is how often the missing functions would be used.

From my experience, the Switch and Merge functions will be missed in about 50 percent of all business-use situations; the Mark Text, Math, Column and Macro functions in perhaps 5 percent of all offices.

The Switch is essential if you want to move copy from a previous document to a current one. The Merge function is effective if you often have a common letter to go to a standard mailing list.

There are two business situations, however, where I heartily recommend the student version:

✓ Where you may wish to try out Word Perfect before committing your company to an expensive change. This is good if the missing functions would be rarely used.

✓ Where extra copies of the program are needed for work stations within your office that do not need the missing functions.

The new version should be the preferred program for any student who may be entering the business world, because it is likely to be encountered there. For other students, programs like pfs:Write are easier to learn and simpler to use.



Segal

Hillel Segal is an independent computer consultant who specializes in helping businesses select and use personal computer software and hardware. He can be reached at the Personal Computer Managers Association, P.O. Box 9003, Boulder 80301.